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**February 22, 2013 Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee**

Governor's Budget Bill

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members, my name is Amos Smith and I serve as President/CEO of the Community Action Agency of New Haven and as the Vice Chair of the Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA). **I am here to express our concern over the Administration's recommendation to eliminate the Human Service Infrastructure – Community Action Program (HSI) line item from the Department of Social Services budget.**

CAFCA is the state association for Connecticut's eleven (11) Community Action Agencies (CAAs). These are the local agencies designated by federal and state governments as partners to help people manage when they're struggling to make ends meet, and to help them find pathways out of poverty.

Our network serves all 169 cities and towns serving more than 400,000 people annually in each and every part of the state. We utilize a Results Based Accountability (RBA) framework to track, analyze and report our outcomes. We collaborate across silos with state government and other nonprofit providers and businesses to help families avoid prolonged crisis. We empower people with information, consistent support, job training, energy assistance, child care, energy conservation services and other vital supports to help them regain their footing. In many instances we serve as a single point of response and triage for families. We administer a variety of programs to reach families as an early intervention strategy. We provide support, assistance and renewal for families when other sources of support have ended (Energy Assistance, Housing Assistance, Substance Abuse, Food Pantry, and Diaper Banks).

As you know, the Governor's budget recommends eliminating a number of funding lines in the budget and rolling those services into a 'Community Services' bucket with reduced funding. Most of the other lines recommended to be eliminated are program services lines which could possibly fit into such a configuration: they are not lines that fund a statewide service delivery system. **That distinction, state support to provide funding for the poverty fighting network, has a long and justified history and is critical to maintaining our ability to assist Connecticut's low income residents to get the help they need when they need it.** The Connecticut legislature has always understood and supported the HSI funding because you understand that the CAAs are a statewide system. HSI is a customer-focused, integrated service delivery system - no door is the wrong door - that helps stabilize communities by giving families the tools they need to rejoin the economy.

You have also understood that **the CAA network is and has been on the forefront in using Results Based Accountability (RBA) to report on and account for every state dollar expended to assist those in need.** We have been reporting outcomes on our state and federal funding since 1996, well before the legislature began asking the administration and service providers to utilize

a RBA methodology. Again, our network is a statewide system that shows proven results with the state funds we receive.

The HSI-Community Action Program funding is critical to maintaining this effective and efficient system and it is the bedrock of support that provides the front line worker with the ability to be there to help those most in need. Among so many other accomplishments, HSI allows parents to work, unemployed persons to receive job training, seniors to remain independent, and low-income families to cut and cover their energy costs. With the HSI, our *proven* programs give families a fighting chance. The Great Recession continues with the families we serve and in the midst of this social and economic turbulence, Connecticut's CAAs have come through as an integral part of our state's social safety net. We have helped families keep their homes, have nutritious meals on their tables, care for their children, and prepare for new careers. While providing services to meet immediate needs, our agencies also work with those in need to develop long-range plans for success.

It is the HSI line item that makes it possible for CAAs to help individuals and families face these challenging times of crisis and allow us to offer them a hand up. Now is not the time to remove this critical state support for Connecticut's poverty fighting Community Action Network. Why is this not the time? This line has been cut for each of the past six years. Such cuts have forced us, in spite of efforts to increase efficiencies, to reduce the help we can provide to meet the multiple needs of our clients. An example of the cuts made is at CAA in New Haven, where staff has been reduced by more than 50 percent over the past five years.

Last month CAFCA and the Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis released the CT Poverty Report titled – *'Meeting the Challenge: The Dynamics of Poverty in Connecticut'*. It describes both statistically and anecdotally just how wide and deep the conditions of poverty are that exist in our great state. We have provided copies of this report to all legislative and administrative officials.

Since the Great Recession began in 2008, demand for our agencies' anti-poverty programs has skyrocketed. The New Poor: people long accustomed to the comforts of middle-class life, are asking for assistance from us - many are those who experienced the '99' weeks of unemployment benefits that came to an end - but among the New Poor practically all are experiencing this level of need for the first time in their lives. They are the people that have played by the rules; received an education, respect authority, worked hard, and raised their children to be industrious. This economic condition we are currently facing has been designated the 'new normal'. A startling example of this 'new normal' is the increase in the case load of the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP), where customer demand for home heating assistance has increased by over 40% at most Community Action Agencies since the recession began. Of course, in addition to energy assistance, these families have multiple other needs as well. These, your constituents in every community in Connecticut, are the very people we serve with the resources provided by HSI.

While not-for-profit organizations are being asked to do more with less and are accustomed to cuts, many of us are also governed by strict federal and state standards of accountability. In keeping with our tradition of measuring and articulating performance and accountability

requirements, we are providing all members with a copy of our 2012 Annual Report "*Empowering People, Building Communities and Keeping hope alive*". We want to stress again, that the CAAs are **one of the only service provider networks in the state that utilizes a RBA system such as the one the legislature has endorsed for many state agencies and service providers for the past several years.**

All of the outcomes reported in our annual report have been accomplished despite the significant challenges thrust upon CAAs by years of funding cuts. HSI has been a significant contributor to us being able to achieve these results. The funding has served as a catalyst to provide key services and attract other support. However, **Connecticut's financial support of our CAAs has decreased dramatically, even as we are asked to do more to help families rejoin the economy.**

So while we struggle to help families face their challenges, we ask you to help us meet ours by continuing to provide the funding support we need to serve your constituents. **You can do this most clearly by maintaining the line item in the budget for the Human Services Infrastructure – Community Action Program.**

Thank you for your time and consideration. And thank you for understanding that Community Action Agencies, as jobs engines and employers in partnership with the State, are a vital part of Connecticut's revival. We look forward to working with you and the Administration to even more effectively support Connecticut's revival in the year ahead and to continue to 'keep hope alive' for those we serve.